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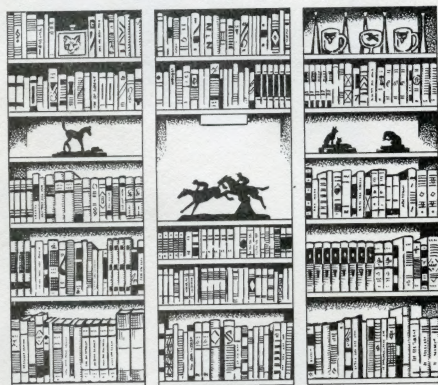
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[Barker, Edwin H.]

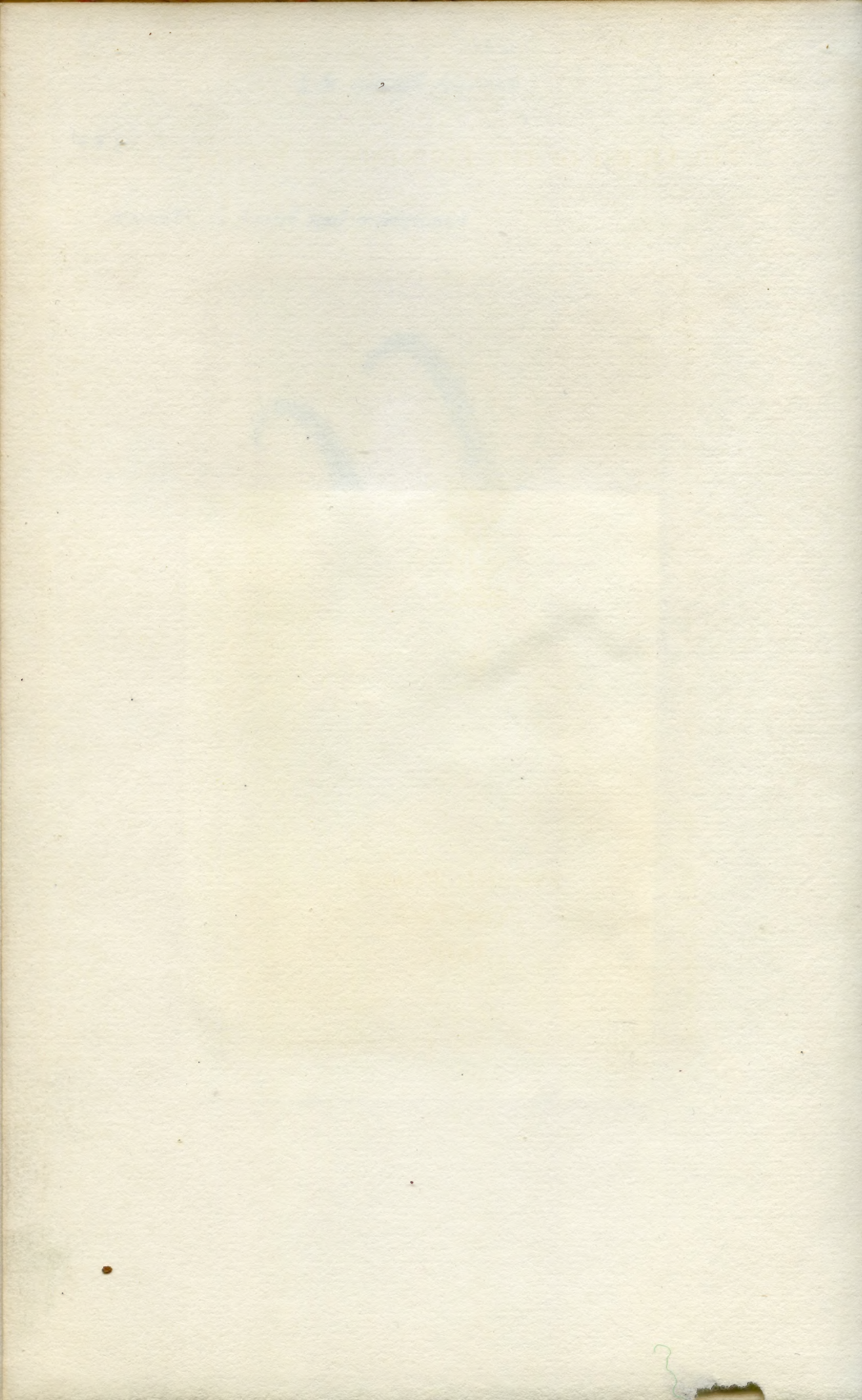
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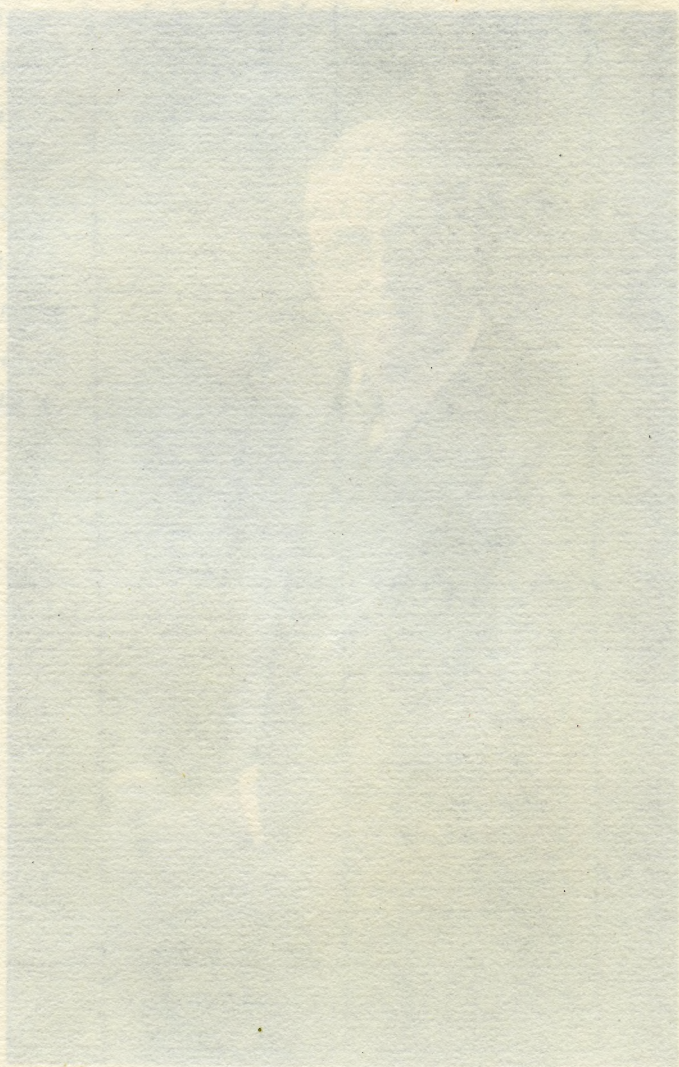
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JOHN AND MARTHA DANIELS



THE QUEST OF THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH



Privately Printed
New York
1930



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John Parker

The story of this hunting trip, organized by our dear friend, J. M. Parker, was written by me at his request prior to his passing to his final happy hunting ground, on September 22, 1929. I present it now in bound form with the hope that the memory of the nobility of his character and the exemplary life he led will sustain, in those of us who were honored by his friendship, the ability to enjoy life in the open and the wholesome society of our fellowmen, regardless of race, color or creed.

Chas. H. Parker
April 17, 1930



The Quest of the Fountain of Youth

THIS is a true chronicle of a search for the "Fountain of Youth" and a very successful search it proved to be. By some, it was expected to be a fishing expedition for the elusive tarpon; by others, it was to be an organized hunt for Mexican Mountain Lions, Leopard Cats and Wild Turkeys: both were partly right, but mainly wrong, for these were but the advertised means which concealed the true end, not revealed by our Chief of Staff and Bon-Ami, J. M. Parker of Kansas City, Mo., Colorado, Arkansas and the world-at-large, when he organized the party.

Weeks were required in preparation; some in New York, much in Kansas City and Texas and some in Old Mexico, the latter being our ultimate destination. Space does not permit the recording of these details but so thoroughly were

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they organized that no hitch occurred, not even in the requirements of the customs or of international etiquette when crossing to and from the Mexican borders, nor while within that foreign country itself.

It is one thing to make up one's mind to do a thing, but another to know best how to do it. J. M. Parker certainly knew the "how to make" this expedition. Over a period of months of preparation there were gathered together, individually and collectively at the various meeting points, food and other supplies, rifles, pistols, shot guns from 20-12 gauges, rounds and rounds of ammunition, fishing tackle, tents, cots, blankets, moving picture and other cameras, tanks of gasoline, lumber, shovels, axes, etc., together with two packs of the best lion hounds in the country; also all necessary permits from the United States and Mexican Governments for the exportation and importation of arms, etc., to and from Mexico. To transport these supplies, as well as to take care of the traveling accommodations of the personnel, required four automobiles and two Ford trucks.

The start was made from Kansas City on Tues-

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day evening, January 22nd with Mr. Parker, Vice President of the Mission Oil Co., as Chief of Staff, accompanied by James Taylor, a legalite of Kansas City and prominent in the city's political ranks; Emanuel E. Norquist, of Kansas City, leading manufacturer of airplanes, airports and sky residences in general, and the writer from New York, a temporarily retired and broken down banker. At Dallas, Texas, we were joined by Charles Smythe of Wichita, Kansas, a local public utility official. Our first stop was Corpus Christi, Texas. En route we amused ourselves with that well known western game of "Give and Take." Matches were used as chips and as the writer was the only one who did not smoke, he did most of the giving while the others, ably assisted by a friend of Jim Taylor whom we met on the train, did the taking.

We arrived safely at Corpus Christi about 7 A. M. January 25th and were met by Major W. R. Swan of the Ocean Beach Drive Co., in which company Mr. Parker had an interest. After a fine breakfast at the hotel we started in autos for Brownsville, via the Ocean Beach

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Drive, along 125 miles of hard beach sand with only here and there a few soft spots, forced upon us by the incoming tide. It was a beautiful sight. No doubt, some day it will be the beach resort of the Southwest. At noon we stopped at a beach house owned by the company, where Major Swan had ready for us a delicious fish dinner. This, by the way, was the only building on the entire 125 miles of beach front excepting those at either end. At the southern end of the beach, we ferried to Point Esabelle and an hour later were at the hotel at Brownsville. There we were met by Col. Lute P. Stover of Mr. Parker's company and Mrs. Stover, both of whom did a great deal to add to our pleasure and comfort. We were shortly joined by Milton West, a personal friend of Gov. Moody of Texas and member of the firm of Davenport, West & Ransom, prominent attorneys of Brownsville; Mr. West was formerly a member of the Texas Rangers and later State District Attorney; Mr. Maurice Bruley, a local gentleman, interested in Mexican ranches and other real estate; Jimmie George a local gentleman; Robert Snow, State Deputy Fish and Game Commissioner and

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Huntsman of the famous King Ranch of Texas; Luther Snow, brother of Bob and Sheriff of Willacy County, Texas; George Dunham, one of Luther Snow's deputy sheriffs and a foreman of the King Ranch, and Sidney Duncan. To West and Bruley belong the credit for making all arrangements for our entry into Mexico.

About seven o'clock we all went over the Mexican border to Matamoras and as the guests of Mr. Parker enjoyed a wonderful wild game dinner. During the evening Mrs. Stover very graciously helped each one to get the kinks out of his system to the tune of a good orchestra.

The next day was well occupied with preparations on both sides of the border and on Saturday forenoon about 7.30 the caravan headed south with the Snow brothers, George Dunham and their two packs of hounds to follow and catch us enroute. These hounds are famous throughout the country for mountain lion and cat hunting. The Snow brothers, too, are famed for their hunting ability, having made a practice of roping these particular wild animals alive.

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Late Saturday afternoon we made camp on the southern outskirts of the little town of San Fernando, Mexico. The journey so far had been through several Mexican villages, which, together with the fording of streams, provided much diversion for us. While waiting for the Snow brothers, we entertained ourselves in the village of San Fernando by throwing small coins to the children. As the news traveled they came from all directions, both boys and girls. We finally had to separate the girls from the boys and treat with each in different ways and on different terms. We managed to get the boys to run races around the block and it was surprising how energetic they could be when once stimulated by the sight of rewards. The people in this section of Mexico are terribly poor but in general seem perfectly satisfied to simply exist.

That night to the tune of "Whoopee" the Snow brothers and George Dunham arrived about 8 o'clock. We were relieved and glad to see them. As darkness settled upon us, the coyotes in countless numbers set up their mournful

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yelps, as though to frighten us away from the wide open country that they called their own. The next morning after breakfast, camp was struck in short order and the caravan started south about 7 o'clock. At noon we stopped for rest and coffee at the Mexican village of Jimenez. Here we purchased the entire stock of a youngster's cookies and sent him home for another basketful. Later in the afternoon we picked up a Mexican guide known to Mr. Bruley and after fording the Soto de la Marina River we made camp up the hill at about 5 o'clock. Mention should be made of the fact that our progress and contact with the natives were made smooth for us by the fact that Spanish á la Mexican was spoken fluently by Messrs. Bruley, West, Dunham and the Snow brothers. Those of us from the North and East missed greatly this knowledge of the spoken language.

Saturday night while the Snow brothers and Dunham took the hounds on a test hunt for mountain lions, the rest of the party occupied itself in making camp, although West and the writer did steal away with the Mexican

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guide to look for a wild turkey roost. These scouting trips were both fruitless. The Snow brothers reported the ground as being hard and dry, rain not having fallen for weeks and the lions and cats, therefore, having left very little trail or scent. This was disappointing but not discouraging, for had not the natives told us that only within the past few days several herd of cattle had been attacked by lions and we were going to camp right in the midst of their activities. Thus we went to our bunks at the various hours of the night anxious for the dawn of realization to arrive.

From 5 o'clock Monday morning on, our camp activities were anything but regular. While Lee, the negro cook, attempted to have the meals at the usual hours, food was the last thing to occupy the thoughts of any of us. We hunted, regardless of time, according to our individual desires and the habits of the particular kind of wild life we intended to trail. During the day ducks, quail, pheasants and deer were shot, while at night we hunted lions, tigers, leopard cats, coyotes and turkeys. For what-

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ever the game, the pursuit usually took us in the direction of the San Antonio Ranch, about six miles away and on the banks of a curve in the river. Our score card for sleep would probably show a low score of two hours each day and a high of six, with four hours per day as bogie.

By Monday night the score for kills totaled but a few ducks and quail, three turkeys, a coyote and a leopard cat—not much, but nevertheless encouraging. Of course the ticks and pinolillos were not counted, although present in camp in large number.

Tuesday morning Shorty Warenken of Mr. Parker's company and driver of one of the trucks and Jimmie George started out after deer, determined to get one or more of those that had been seen the previous afternoon. Jimmie was mad clear through for he missed the opportunity of shooting at a herd of about seventeen Javali, which passed him while trailing the deer. Milton West, Bruley and the writer left in West's car for a two day's trip to some sulphur springs about 25 miles distant. We took food supplies for the Snow brothers and Dunham, who

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had gone out again Monday night for lions and were to meet us at the springs. Tuesday noon, about fifteen miles from camp, we punctured the crank case pan of the motor bumping a stump which put our automobile completely out of service. Fortunately, we were but half a mile from a Mexican ranch occupied by an acquaintance of Mr. Bruley. Here we were given lunch and the assistance of Mexican boys and horses. The lunch consisted of a mixture of coarse rice and eggs served on a platter with tortillas and queer tasting black coffee. As neither forks nor spoons were provided, we quickly learned the art of eating without them, for we were indeed hungry, and even the grunting of the pigs and the cackling of the hens that had the free run of the open air dining space in the midst of which our table had been spread, could not destroy our hunger nor nullify our appreciation of the friendly spirit with which we were received by these simple Mexican people. While lunch was being prepared, a Mexican boy was sent back to camp on horseback with the broken crank case, and a note of instructions to repair the case and have

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car brought back to camp. Another Mexican boy was sent on horseback to the springs with the food supplies for the Snow brothers and Dunham. At the expiration of the time demanded by the courtesies of the situation, West, Bruley and the writer left on horseback with two Mexican boys as guides and after fording the river twice, reached the springs at about four o'clock in the afternoon. Here we took a bath in the swiftly flowing sulphur water and its refreshing effect was almost instantaneous. About 150 yards away on a sand point projecting into the river we made our camp, such as it was. It consisted of making a fire and, a short distance away on the sand, spreading out the single blanket as a bed for the three of us. Shortly afterwards, the Mexican boy returned, having followed the Snow brothers to San Antonio Ranch before catching up with them. He brought back the report that two deer had been killed by our main camping party and that they were then breaking camp and re-establishing it at San Antonio, to be nearer the wild life. Two of the Mexicans left us to return to their ranch, while

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one with his horse remained as our guide. He, West and the writer went after turkey while Bruley shot ducks down the river. About 8.30 the Mexican boy cooked a pair of the ducks which, with his toasted Mexican tortillas and a half a grapefruit each, comprised our dinner. The turkey West shot was saved to be brought back to the main camp. That evening about 10.30 we dug holes in the sand for our hips and with our clothes on and the one blanket spread over us, went to sleep beside the fire, looking up at a gorgeous blue sky filled completely with the brightest of stars. About one o'clock in the morning we were awakened by the war hoops of Bob Snow and his Mexican guide. He was soaking wet, his horse having stumbled while fording the small stream nearby. Bob jumped to safety but missed the shore in the darkness. It seemed that "Queenie," the leader of his pack of hounds had not returned upon the call of the horn and he was retracing the ground looking for her. It was later reported that Queenie was seen on the main road to Matamoras, about twenty miles from where she was lost, heading north

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on her way to the American border. At first we thought she might have been eaten by an alligator, while swimming the river for it contained numerous alligators as long as 15 feet.

We sat around the fire until about 2.30 A. M., talking to Bob who confirmed to us the report of the change in camp location to San Antonio. He reported Shorty having killed two deer and Jimmie George wounding another which got away. At five o'clock that morning we were up again and after a sumptuous breakfast of half a grapefruit each, left Bob Snow and his guide to continue his search for Queenie, while we headed for San Antonio, arriving there about 11.30 A. M. We found the camp completely re-established and from there the hunt activities continued. During the days that followed quail and wild pigeons were shot and at night more wild turkeys. One morning, in the wee hours another leopard cat was brought in, having been shot by Sid Duncan.

These lion and cat hunts are the most exciting hunts the writer has participated in, for they last anywhere from three to six hours after the

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hounds get the scent. Sometimes the cats—particularly—jump three or four times after being treed by the hounds and each time it means a merry chase for the hunter to keep up with the hounds. Once the trail becomes hot, the chase usually leads through the thickest of the jungle, for there the cats and lions know they have the greatest protection. Sometimes, we had to crawl on hands and knees to get through and this in the middle of the night with the aid of but a hand flashlight. When the cat has been treed by the hounds, the hunter locates it in the tree by a flashlight and kills it with a six shooter. The treeing of the cat is known to the hunter by the sound of the hounds' bark, which is quite different from that when they are on the run or at the heels of their prey.

These regions are infested with numerous varieties of wild bird life. Many species of ducks were observed that are becoming quite scarce in the North. In the morning and late afternoon the air was filled with them and with wild parrots on the wing. The magnitude of the noise of their quacks and chatter was only exceeded by that of the yelps of the coyotes which usually

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started with the break of day and opened up again for an evening performance at about 8 P. M. The blue doves were also quite plentiful but not as noisy. However, the Chachalacas, (Mexican brush pheasant) when hunted made up in noise what they lacked in quantity. All these birds in varying numbers became the victims of the accurate marksmanship of Messrs. Taylor, Smythe, Norquist and Parker.

All good things must come to an end, so early Friday morning February 1st, we broke camp and headed for home via Reader's Ranch "El Chamal", our destination for that night. While we all regretted to leave, the threatening weather reconciled us to it. The rain of the night before made traveling in the soft road very bad and the climbing of the banks of the river most difficult for the trucks. In fact, to get up the bank of the Soto de la Marina it required the combined strength of all hands with block and tackle assisted by the pull of a horse and a mule driven by two Mexicans. Thus does humanity progress in this backward country. In spite of this, we made good time thereafter.

At noon we stopped at a small village for

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lunch. The local adobe hotel provided the fire for our coffee and tables for our food. This hotel, we noticed, was not quite like the Ritz, for it consisted of a hut of one room with an iron cot bed leaning against the wall, to be provided, we assumed, with a blanket or two should a traveller care to stop overnight. In front of the open door was a table for meal service. To the left of this hut was another one used as kitchen. Here a crude open fire served to heat the coffee. This fire, by the way, rested on an earthen bench and had all the appearances of a blacksmith's forge. These huts with one or two others were arranged in a square enclosed by a fence to give it privacy. After lunch we journeyed on through plains and jungle with here and there a small settlement used as headquarters of a ranch owner. At about 5.30 we arrived at "El Chamal."

"El Chamal" is a story by itself. It is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Reader and the headquarters of their 160,000 acre ranch. As we approached it in the distance from along the bank of an arroyo, we realized its American ownership. It appeared like an oasis in the desert, for while the type of the old buildings and arrange-

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ment of the main house and outbuildings were of the typical Mexican style, the cleanliness of the grounds and the buildings denoted American ownership. After crossing the bridge over the arroyo, we passed some outbuildings and then entered the main gate to the house proper, which was a rambling two story affair, the first being of stone and plaster, while the second story was of wood, added by Mr. Reader after he had purchased the property. As we neared the main house we were rather startled to see waiting to greet us a charming young woman dressed in a light tan tennis shirt open at the throat, with knickers and stockings and low shoes. This was Mrs. Reader. She was accompanied by a young girl about twenty years old, dressed in overalls and a young boy about 18. The young girl turned out to be a guest from Texas and the young man, Mrs. Reader's son. The Readers were friends of Mr. Bruley, so we were given a hearty welcome, bag and baggage. We were disappointed not to meet Mr. Reader, who was away on business at Brownsville. "El Chamal" is 125 miles from the nearest railroad station, so that the obtaining of food supplies is of all importance

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to the Readers. The degree of hospitality of this home is only limited by the amount of supplies which the guests bring. As we had a good supply of food and a colored cook to help prepare the meals, we naturally, with Mrs. Reader's laughing acquiescence, took possession of the entire house. Sleeping quarters were provided upstairs and after a good wash up all around we assembled in the large living room, where an open fire-place added to the romance of this old ranch house. Mrs. Reader was a charming hostess and held her own in the general all-around kidding that ensued. It seemed but a short time when dinner was announced. We proceeded to the dining room where with Mrs. Reader at the head of the table, ten of us sat down to what will be remembered as the finest dinner ever eaten by any of us. The "pièce de resistance" was the wild turkey that we had killed the night before and which Lee, our negro cook, had roasted in a way to suit a king's taste. After dinner, dancing was enjoyed in the living room to the tune of the radio. It seemed rather strange to be getting music from New York, Chicago and Kansas City in this out-

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of-the-way place. That night we retired fairly early and left in autos at about 7.30 the next morning for a day's outing at the mouth of the Soto de la Marina River, about 75 miles south of "El Chamal." Here we hoped to catch some tarpon as Mr. Smythe was an expert game fisherman as well as crack shot with the guns. We arrived at a little village and secured a small motor boat which Mr. Bruley, Mr. Smythe and the Mexican guide piloted to the mouth of the river a mile or two distant, while the rest of us proceeded in the auto. Although four tarpons broke water at the inlet and were seen by our party, not a strike resulted. It seemed that the water and weather had as yet not warmed up sufficiently for good tarpon fishing. The mouth of the river, however, presented a beautiful marine setting and we felt rewarded for the trip by the picture we saw. We crossed in the motor boat to the other side of an inlet about two miles away to the headquarters of a rather unusual fishing company. From here large nets are set with motor boats and about 900 pounds of fish are shipped daily by airplane to Brownsville, 200 miles away. The manager of this outfit, an

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American, received us cordially and although not able to provide us with bread for our lunch, he did carry half of our party back to our machines in his motor boat, thereby making it necessary for our own boat to make but one trip. While returning we were startled to see in the water some distance back, Milton West's bird dog. He was swimming against the tide. We turned about and found him quite exhausted by the time we pulled him into the boat. The Mexican boy we left with our autos informed us that after we went, the dog ran about a mile down the shore and then swam the channel about a mile across to an island. From the island he had put out after our boat as we were returning. Such is a good dog's devotion to his master.

We made a fire on the shore and had a lunch of bread and baked oysters which had been secured for us in the bay by a Mexican fisherman. Although not as solid as the northern oyster, these had a satisfying flavor. We returned to "El Chamal" late that afternoon, amply qualified to devour the fine dinner that would follow. Just before dinner we all gathered in the rear yard of "El Chamal" where Mrs. Reader exhibited to us her prize horses and livestock.

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The influence of her laughter and charming personality seemed to bring out the hidden attributes of some of the members of our party. In the midst of a heated argument as to whether or not Shorty could milk the Bramah Cow, Jim Taylor mounted a stump and delivered an oration from Ceasar. While he orated, Sid Duncan and Bob Snow gave an exhibition of Roping, so that when we sat down to the dinner table we were all in a hilarious mood and felt as though we had always known our hostess and her home.

About 9 o'clock while the rest were playing poker Milton West and the writer with a Mexican boy slipped away in an auto with our shot guns in quest of wild turkeys. We shot one and returned to the house about 10 P. M. At about 10.30 we left again with Mrs. Reader's son after big game. This was to be the writer's first experience hunting with a headlight. We parked our autos about 15 miles from the house, and the Mexican guide, with a headlight like a miner's electric torch, followed by Milton West and the writer, tramped the plains and jungle for fully 12 miles. We picked up but one pair of eyes in the darkness and although the writer

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was delegated to do the killing, the animal was gone before he could fire. What it was we could not tell; the guide claimed it was a big buck, while Milton West thought it was a big wild cat. We finally returned to the auto and waited until Mrs. Reader's son and the guide had a trial. This likewise proved fruitless. At 3.30 A. M. we were back in the house only to find most of the members of our party engaged in rubbing kerosene from the lamps over their itching bodies. The pinolillos were still working overtime. The kerosene and gasoline seemed to be the only thing that would drive them from the body. They are very fine insects that infect the jungle and its wild life. When once on the body of a person, they bury themselves beneath the skin, and then there is H - - - to pay.

We were all up at 5 o'clock and in spite of our protest Mrs. Reader was up too, to see that a proper breakfast was served to us. It was hard for us to leave this very friendly house. In our short stay we had learned to know real hospitality and to admire the charm and courage of our hostess. She appeared to be the real defender of her home, for Mr. Reader was away quite a

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good deal. She, however, was absolutely fearless, could shoot as quickly and as accurately as a man, could ride a horse and drive a car as well as the best. She was handy with all kinds of tools and able to make emergency repairs to auto or house. She, however, was neither masculine in action, speech nor figure. All in all she personified the heroine of a novel and no doubt her actual life was as interesting and romantic. She was a widow when she married Mr. Reader, a widower. We met Mr. Reader later in Brownsville and he turned out to be equally as interesting; tall of stature, eyes that sparkled and a voice that was commanding but still attractive. He was a fitting half for "El Chamal." Whether he was the better half or not, only their intimate friends can say. With cordial invitations to come again, we left "El Chamal" at 7 A. M. and headed for Brownsville, or rather Matamoras, 125 miles away. Fortunately, we made good time and after a few formalities at the border we arrived at the hotel in Brownsville at about 5.30 in the afternoon, tired but happy with a game bag of two deer, many wild turkeys, five wild cats, a small panther and all kinds of smaller game.

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A wild game dinner at Matamoras followed by dancing completed the day and night and brought our trip to a close.

Our expedition was a huge success. It revealed to us the location of the Fountain of Youth in the person of our honored host, J. M. Parker. His unbounded energy, his effervescent personality and ready wit, together with his kindly consideration for the comforts and well being of his fellow men were the bubbling pools of the waters of life, of which we all freely partook. While with him, no moment was a dull one,—he was the last to “hit the hay” at night and the first to arise in the morning. His spirit restored to us all that power to really enjoy life, which the daily grind of active business affairs had almost lost to us. From now on our motto is to be “*If Business Interferes with Hunting or Fishing, Forget Business.*”



*Twenty five copies of this book
were printed for Edwin H. Barker by
H. K. Brewer & Co., New York
in January, 1930*

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were printed for Edwin H. Barker by
H. K. Bissell & Co., New York
in January, 1930

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